

# Accidental Balabusta



## Pot roast for Rosh Hashanah

SHELLEY CIVKIN

There's no denying that food is an insanely large part of Jewish life. Whether we're cooking it, eating it or writing about it, our lives inexorably orbit around it. It's true that most religions celebrate their holidays, at least partially, through food. But we Jews have taken the concept to nosebleed-worthy stratospheric heights. If someone tells you their son is becoming bar mitzvah, our first question is not "Which shul?" but "What are you serving?" A brisk? We don't ask: "What time?" but rather, "What can I make?"

It's not that modern-day Yiddishkeit revolves around food, but it kinda does. I'm fully aware that we're supposed to focus on blessing and elevating the food we eat, since it is meaningless on its own. From a religious perspective, food is merely the vehicle to give us the strength to do mitzvahs and study Torah. I get it. But how can you ignore the deliciousness of a rock-star chicken soup or a melt-in-your-mouth brisket?

When you pair Rosh Hashanah and food, what do you get? Pure joy. And maybe a little indigestion, if there's excess onion and garlic on the guest list. We all know that the High Holidays are a time to relax with family, eat lovingly prepared meals and go to shul. And, while shul is certainly important, for some, the highlight is the food.

From many years of observation, I've deduced that there are three main contenders at the Ashkenazi Rosh Hashanah table: matzah ball soup, brisket and gefilte fish. And maybe chicken. Or salmon, if you're a true Vancouverite. Anything else is considered "alternative." Seriously, when was the last time someone served tofu or sunomono at Rosh Hashanah dinner? Asked and answered.

Being firmly entrenched in the carnivore camp, I decided I'm going to make a pot roast for Rosh Hashanah this year. Being a pot roast virgin, until recently I knew next to nothing about this cut of meat or how to cook it. How did I get to be 63 years old without knowing these things? Rhetorical question. Anyway, I did what any self-respecting Accidental Balabusta would do — I Googled it. I found a recipe from the Food Network by Ree Drummond, called Perfect Pot Roast! I followed the recipe religiously (OK, minus the sheitel), except I made a mini-roast (one-and-three-quarter pounds) in case I screwed it up. And I used beef blade roast, which is the same as chuck roast, apparently. I

cooked it at 275°F for two-and-a-half hours. It turned out as scrumptious as something a bubbe would make. Only better. Modesty, wherefore art thou?

Over the years, I've heard gossip about pot roast: that it calls for a cheap, tough cut of meat (true); that it's not really a Jewish cut of meat (see Snobbery 101); and that only goyim eat it (see Racism 101). I'm living proof that pot roast is a very Jewish thing. And, excuse me if I brag, but my newfound pot roast is beyond delicious. Or, to use the vernacular, a mechaye.



I feel compelled to mention something a little odd at this juncture. When I brought my first pot roast and took it out of the package, I noticed it had heavy twine wrapped around it. I wondered whether I'd purchased the B&D variety by mistake. Googling the twine part set my mind at ease. I mean, who wants to serve a kinky Rosh Hashanah pot roast?

Call me clairvoyant or, on second thought, don't (that's really not a Jewish thing), but I think you might be chomping at the bit for this recipe. Wait no longer. Allow me to introduce you to the Perfect Pot Roast by Ree Drummond. BTW, it calls for a Dutch oven, but any deep, covered roasting pan will do just fine. (Don't feel bad, I had to Google Dutch oven, too.) Go ahead, cook it and tell me if this doesn't taste Jewish.

### PERFECT POT ROAST

- Salt and ground black pepper**
- One 3-5 pound chuck roast (same as beef blade roast)**
- 2-3 tbsp olive oil**
- 2 whole onions, peeled and halved**
- 6-8 whole carrots, peeled and cut into 2-inch pieces**
- 1 cup red wine (doesn't need to be anything fancy)**
- 3 cups beef broth**
- 2-3 sprigs fresh rosemary**

- 2-3 sprigs fresh thyme**
- 2-3 potatoes, peeled and cut into pieces**

1. Preheat oven to 275°F.
2. Generously salt and pepper the roast.
3. Heat the olive oil in a large fry pan or Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Add the halved onions to the pot, browning them on both sides. Remove the onions to a plate.
4. Throw the carrots into the same fry pan or Dutch oven and toss them around a bit until slightly browned. Set aside the carrots with the onions.
5. If needed, add a bit more olive oil to the fry pan or Dutch oven. Place the meat in the fry pan or Dutch oven and sear it for about a minute on all sides, until it is nice and brown all over. Remove the roast to a plate.
6. With the burner still on medium-high, use either red wine or beef broth (about one cup) to deglaze the fry pan or Dutch oven, scraping the bottom with a whisk. Put the roast back into the Dutch oven (or deep, covered roasting pan) and add enough beef broth to cover the meat halfway.
7. Add in the onions and the carrots, along with the fresh herbs. Add potatoes, too (optional).
8. Put the lid on, then roast it.
9. The original recipe says to roast a three-pound roast for three hours or a four-to-five-pound roast for four hours. I personally don't think this is nearly time enough. When I cooked two two-pound roasts in a single roaster at once, it took six-and-a-half hours to cook. The roast is ready when it's fall-apart tender. I think the longer you cook it, the more tender it gets. It's hard to screw this up, unless you undercook it.

Important note: don't get too close to your Dutch oven when you lift the lid during cooking or you'll get what I call the "pot roast facial." I'm not sure your pores will appreciate all that meaty steam. But who am I to say? Just don't blame me if you get third-degree facial burns. Bon appetit! Or, eat it and weep. From joy, that is.

May you all have a happy, healthy, prosperous and peaceful New Year! 🍷

Shelley Civkin, aka the Accidental Balabusta, is a happily retired librarian and communications officer. For 17 years, she wrote a weekly book review column for the Richmond Review, and currently writes a bi-weekly column about retirement for the Richmond News.

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## Shana Tova Umetuka!

Wishing you all a healthy, peaceful and prosperous New Year!



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